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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000449

SIPDIS

RIYADH PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN

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SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA MFA AND OIC OFFICIALS COMMENT ON  
UPCOMING INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE IN NEW YORK

REF: RIYADH 01574

Classified By: ACTING CONSUL GENERAL CB TONEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. C) SUMMARY. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs official states the significance of a high-level inter-faith dialogue being planned by Saudi Arabia to take place in New York in November with a key long-term goal of combating extremism. An OIC official denies a role in planning the event, but expresses a willingness to participate in the dialogue if invited. END SUMMARY.

Saudi Arabia has Major Goals for Potential

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Inter-Faith Dialogue in New York  
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¶2. (C) On October 21, Saudi Arabia Desk Officer and PolOff met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mecca Branch Director General Mohamed bin Ahmed Tayeb. The DG offered his comments on a potential high-level Saudi sponsored inter-faith dialogue to be held in New York in November. The DG supports the dialogue as it will, "help very much in bi-lateral relations".

¶3. (C) The DG sees inter-faith dialogue as linked to the fight against terrorism, recognizing that "we (Saudi Arabia) have extremists" and asking, "How can we deal with people to convince them that others are not the enemies?" He noted that, "Jews, Christians, and Muslims are people of the book(we have shared common values." According to Tayeb, the dialogue may be part of an inter-faith alliance in the long-run with an aim of taking on extremists. The DG believes that the dialogue will lead to progress, reiterating that, "We expect an action plan(not just a statement." This is not consistent with what Prince Saud recently said was a hope only for a statement from the UNGA President. (REFTEL)

¶4. (C) Tayeb sees Saudi Arabia playing a leading role in inter-faith dialogue, stating that, "interfaith without Saudi will not be interfaith." He mentioned the significance of Saudi Arabia as the protector of the holy sights of Mecca and Medina. In addition to Saudi Arabia, the DG maintained the importance of other countries including the OIC, stressing that, "they will have a role(we want the whole world to work together."

¶5. (C) Director General Tayeb indicated that the inter-faith conference will have high level representation with Prince Sa'ud being the lowest level dignitary that the Saudi Arabia will send. When asked about the possibility of King Abdullah attending, Tayeb replied, "The King might attend this dialogue(I think that he will attend." He assured that the

King is serious about the initiative, being, "a man of faith, and not a politician."

OIC Official Comments on the Role in the Dialogue

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¶6. (C) PolOff and Saudi Arabia Desk Officer met with Ambassador Mahdy Fathallah, Director of the Political Affairs Section at the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Jeddah on October 21. Fathallah stated that the inter-faith dialogue is a Saudi initiative and not an OIC one. While Fathallah sees nothing significantly new in this initiative, he did note the importance of Saudi Arabia leading the event, noting that as one of the most conservative members of the OIC, it may be well-positioned to promote inter-faith internationally. Fathallah claimed that the OIC had not been asked to participate in the dialogue, but that the Secretary General would do so if asked.

¶7. (C) Fathallah remarked that the real interest of the OIC is addressing Islamophobia. He stated that there is no plan for the OIC to launch a new anti-defamation resolution at the UN. Fathallah stated an interest in improving education and outreach aimed at correcting misperceptions of Islam. He believes the US role is counter-productive, claiming that America is trying to Westernize the educational curriculum of other countries and is trying to impose its own values.

¶8. (C) COMMENT. The OIC official's comments on the inter-faith dialogue being a purely Saudi Arabian initiative may be an attempt to assert the organization's independence from its most influential member. END COMMENT.

JEDDAH 00000449 002 OF 002

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